

REDEFINING PRIORITIES:

ground-up
initiative

Ground-Up Initiative nurtures resilient, grounded stewards of society by empowering them to discover their sense of purpose.

by Bertrand Leong

Breaking the Stereotype

Outward appearances can be deceiving—even obscuring the scale and importance of one's work. Mention “eco-village”, and an image of a hippie community of tree-hugging environmental activists might come to mind. In fact, many visitors to Ground-Up Initiative's (GUI) Kampung Kampus arrive on the erroneous presumption that GUI is primarily involved in urban farming.

But unbeknownst to many, the inconspicuous 26,000 square metre space harbours a grand masterplan of nurturing a 5G (Gracious, Green, Giving, Grounded, and Grateful) nation. Nestled in Lorong Chencharu (Yishun) and tucked away in a part of the former Bottle Tree Park is Ground-Up Initiative (a non-profit organisation) and its social enterprises. In Kampung Kampus, visitors will find an incubator for many green initiatives and platforms that nurture hearts while aspiring to serve as a showcase for sustainable living for Singapore and the region. It is run by professionals with hearts for volunteerism.

Vision for a 21st Century Kampung Culture

When kampung chief Mr Tay Lai Hock was in the Sahara Desert and in New Zealand years ago, he realised that Singapore had lost its village culture and that Singaporeans had become too risk averse and disconnected from the land and from one another. He felt that Singaporeans needed to redefine their understanding of success, happiness, and education in order to discover a new narrative for Singapore. His vision was to nurture resilient, grounded stewards of society by empowering them to discover their sense of purpose. For this reason, GUI was mooted to empower Singaporeans to take creative risks; be unafraid of making mistakes; and make the world better by reconnecting with themselves, their environment, and community.

To do this, he needed a plot of land to put his vision to action. “I showed them (the Singapore government) what I did since 2009 in Bottle Tree Park, and all the programmes that we ran over the years and what we want. What we want in education, what we want Singapore to be in terms of innovation, national development. A 5G nation—Gracious, Green, Giving, Grounded, and Grateful. This was the masterplan,” says Mr Tay.¹

The 5Gs

Mr Cai Bingyu, the kampung architect and built team lead who spearheads the building initiatives at Kampung Kampus says that the 5Gs are a response to the five-Cs (car, cash, condominium, credit card, and country club membership)—a phrase which Singaporeans are familiar with.

“The 5Gs are not a list of key performance indicators (KPIs) but a reminder of who we are. We believe these 5Gs can bring Singapore further and make her better. Graciousness is the first G because a nation of gracious people will make a happy city. The second G—Green involves the 6Rs (Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, and Recycle). Just like how Palo Alto is the birthplace for many famous startups, Kampung Kampus hopes to do the same for Singapore. It aspires to be an exemplar of best practices for sustainable living in Singapore and the region. Through our 21st century *kampung* culture; hands-on learning approach; and eco-friendly buildings, we hope to achieve a zero carbon footprint with energy-efficient green technologies and nurture an eco-conscious community. The rest of the Gs: grounded, giving, and grateful involve understanding one's inherent symbiotic connection to our environment. The more we are nurtured spiritually and psychologically by it, the more we will understand how important it is to conserve this inspiring life-giving force by being grounded, giving, and grateful. These values are put into the programmes we do.”

Overcoming Barriers

To enable GUI to do this, Mr Cai says it is imperative for its building structures to go up so that people can see tangible results on their projects. Its “HeartQuarters”

About Kindness@Work

Since 2013, the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM) has been promoting the Kindness@Work programme to various organisations. We invite corporate leaders to consider initiating Kindness@Work for better psychological and emotional wellness in the same way that wellness and healthy lifestyle programmes have become *de rigueur* in human resource management practice.

The Kindness@Work programme is an internal initiative aimed at generating happier and more gracious workplace environments in Singapore. It involves putting the three pillars of graciousness—consideration, courtesy, and gratitude into action at the workplace. The programme can be implemented through a series of workshops and keynote talks. SKM also offers various resources for organisations to start their own in-house kindness activities and initiatives, or to adapt and fit in elements of Kindness@Work into the company's own existing employee engagement programme.

For Singapore to become a gracious society, the transformation begins right within our organisations. Employees who are unhappy at work often vent their frustrations on their families and in common shared spaces in the community. Conversely, happy and engaged workers can spread the kindness and graciousness they feel in the workplace into their other relationships and interactions. Spreading kindness should be our corporate social responsibility. And it starts with each one of us, with leaders and representatives of organisations taking initiative and responsibility.

The end goal is to make Singapore a better place for everyone to work, play, and live in. For more information on the Kindness@Work Programme, please E-mail the Singapore Kindness Movement at kindness@kindness.sg.

The truth is, kindness and performance are not mutually exclusive. In fact, practising kindness and graciousness at work can lead to better performance and profitability. Researchers at the Harvard Business School found that happy workers who enjoy their work and have fun working together perform their jobs better.

Professor Teresa Amabile and Mr Steve Kramer of the Harvard Business School found that “People are more productive, creative, committed, and collegial when they have positive emotions... and when they are motivated by intrinsic interest in the work itself.”²

According to *The Huffington Post*³, “66 per cent surveyed say that positive relationships increased their productivity and 55 per cent say that positive relationships mitigate on-the-job stress levels.”

When kindness and graciousness are deeply rooted in the corporate culture, the business will profit from higher levels of employee engagement, greater synergy and loyalty, and more fulfilling working relationships. This translates into a more motivated workforce and lower staff turnover, so employers can better retain talent. Furthermore, engaged and invested employees will be more proactive in innovating and creating solutions for the organisation, whether these be for exter-

nal marketing or for internal processes. The net result is higher profitability in more ways than one. In sum, kindness is good for business. ◯

References

¹ Hamilton D, 2011, 5 beneficial side effects of kindness, *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-r-hamilton-phd/kindness-benefits_b_869537.html.

² *Connecting Happiness and Success, Increasing productivity and profitability with happiness*, <http://connectinghappinessandsuccess.com/other-happiness/happiness-at-work/increasing-productivity-and-profitability-with-happiness/>.

³ Hall A, 2015, *The key to happiness at work that has nothing to do with your actual job*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/04/happiness-at-work_n_6613358.html.



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